

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON VEGETARIANISM AND VEGANISM



Is food security an issue for vegetarians and vegans?

7 December 2020 via Zoom video-conferencing

(Please note this is a paraphrased summary of the speakers' contributions and not a verbatim account.)

Christina Rees MP, Chair of APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism, opened the meeting and introduced the speakers and Parliamentarian in attendance, Baroness Galea.

Nathaniel Harper, Worthing Vegan Food Bank

- Established a local vegan food bank during the pandemic, which also now caters for other dietary needs such as diabetic and coeliac.
- Worthing Vegan Food Bank has shelves that mirror what many food banks have except they do not have dairy or meat products. They have vegan alternatives to common items such as milk.
- They can provide fresh fruit and vegetables when donated as well, which allows those who use the service to have fresh and nutritious meals.
- Nathaniel believes there are ample basic vegan options in traditional food banks if they are given out appropriately – though the advantage of vegan-specific food banks is their ability to provide a greater range of foods suitable for, and meeting the nutritional needs of, those who follow special diets.

Jen Elford, The Vegetarian Society

- The Vegetarian Society has recently begun working with food banks to provide nutritious and healthy meals for families.
- The food boxes given out are designed to be easy, ready-to-cook meals that are enjoyable for both non-vegetarians and vegetarians.
- There have been 2,700 boxes (or 22,000 meals) since the project's launch in 2020. Costs are approximately £4 per box, and these have been launched across 5 cities in England and Scotland, so far.
- The vegan bean chili box offers higher or equal levels of protein and iron compared with beef chili. There is also less fat in the vegan chili box.
- There has been outstanding feedback from non-vegetarian users who have not eaten meals made vegetarian like this before, and the majority say they would make meals like this again.

Yasmine El-Gabry, V for Life

- Food security affects people living in care as well as in a community setting.
- The recent Hospital Food Review outlines how more veg*n food options are needed in hospitals to keep people fed healthy and nutritious meals.

- The government food boxes sent during the COVID-19 pandemic did not cater well for dietary requirements, meaning that individuals were stuck deciding between eating the ingredients provided or practicing their beliefs.
- There are V for Life resources to help with some food security concerns such as the charity's Veggie Meals to your Door guide and good grocery shopping guide created to help volunteers shop for vegetarians, vegans, and other dietary needs, such as for coeliac.
- There need to be more provisions in place to protect people from food security concerns, especially more vulnerable individuals.

Comments from Parliamentarians:

- *Baroness Galea: With vegan food parcels do people ask for them or are they just given out? How do we educate caterers on what is vegetarian/vegan?*
 - Jen Elford: Important to ask questions and remind caterers it is important to know answers to these questions.
 - Yasmine El-Gabry: V for Life ensures caterers are trained and offers regular training for caterers to make sure they do understand vegetarianism and veganism.
- *Christina Rees MP: Asking if food banks deliver and how it works?*
 - Jen said their project is centralised so there is some limitation getting it to smaller food banks, but there are volunteers who help deliver meals to those who cannot get out or access the food bank in person.
 - Nathaniel said all their staff are volunteers and volunteers do deliver meals but it is limited because of being a volunteer-only service.
- *Baroness Galea: Reminds everyone to be respectful on everyone's views of vegetarianism and veganism.*

Audience questions/comments:

- *What is the situation for vegetarians and vegans in the military?*
 - No panellists had any answers and are unfamiliar with veg*nism in the military.
- *Whether The Vegetarian Society sends dried pulses or tinned?*
 - Lentils are sent dry because they are easy to cook and quick. Kidney beans are tinned because they need cooking for longer times and can be dangerous to eat when not fully cooked.
- *Where can people get more information on how to help with these types of projects?*
 - Nathaniel suggests researching online.
 - Yasmine recommends that anyone who has struggled in a care home or care sector and needs assistance or wants to discuss their situation can contact V for Life for assistance or information.
 - Jen says donations for this project can be made online and businesses who want to work on this project can contact her directly.
- *A local food bank said no one wants vegan items and it contrasts with Nathaniel's experience, is there any central guidance to cater for veg*ns?*
 - There isn't any central guidance because many still see veganism as being 'picky'. Nathaniel suggests asking the food bank that is rejecting these foods where else they can be given, or to contact Worthing Vegan Food Bank for recommendations.
- *Are there any data or current collection of data to understand food security and its prevalence?*
 - Jen says the food banks that The Vegetarian Society is working with are collecting data as the food banks project goes on and it's a start to collecting data.
 - Yasmine is starting researching in 2021 to

look further into food security among older vegetarians and vegans so there may be some more answers later in the year.